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Yaçh and Yaçhôlo still receive attention in some localities as beings capable of affecting, at least prejudicially, the prosperity of the crops.

Turning now to purely human beings gifted with supernatural powers we find two principal representatives of the class: the Rû.i, a woman displaying some of the powers and proclivities of the western witch, and the Daiyâl, a person of either sex endowed with some of the abilities of the Seer and the Prophet.

There are also the possessors of the EVIL EYE, voluntary or involuntary, and there are persons who have acquired powers of magic (chhla).

These are the principal Dramatis Personæ of the Living Supernatural, and we may now examine their peculiarities in somewhat greater detail, paying particular attention to the Bôyo, the Chhçh and the Rû.i, partly because of their peculiarly local character, as signalized by their purely local names, and partly because of their intrinsic importance.

THE BÔYO

From what I have heard I very much fear that the Bôyo are as extinct as the Dodo, though their extinction is of quite recent date. Perhaps they still enjoy a tenuous existence in the phantasies of some elderly minds, but their day of power and awe is gone, their cult is dead, and their worshippers departed.

From the little information I possess it appears that the Bôyo lived in holes at the foot of trees and rocks; and that the cult consisted in placing offerings of food, at any rate of slaughtered animals, at the foot of the trees, i.e. presumably in front of the holes. The Bôyo themselves are described as puppies, or animals like puppies, so this simple form of worship was probably acceptable to them. At any rate they condescended to eat the offerings.

There were Bôyo in residence at a spot on the Dadimo Lat a little above the fort at Hindi, and the cult was maintained

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he keeps quiet. The man has children, their appearance they say, is ill-favoured, like that of a Yaṣḥ. The Yaṣḥ lives in his house and he (Roskli) is superior, they say, to all the Astôris in wealth. They say that the Yaṣḥ is in Roskli's house in the skin of a cat. They say that his wife's food every seven days is 24 eggs and 2 seers (4 lb.) of ghee. This matter is publicly known to all the people. A number of Astôri people have told us this story." The wife's diet seems rather limited in kind, but bread and vegetables are perhaps taken for granted. 776

Yaṣḥṭio

The Yaṣḥṭio,[1] by his name, must be some sort of cousin of the Yaṣḥ, but he is a shadowy personage whose only known interests are agricultural. Here is all the information I have about him: "At the time of the reaping of the wheat and barley, in the name of the Yaṣḥṭio they put some mîli (gruel) in a dish and carry it to some place in a field where there is a big stone and where they say the Yaṣḥṭio is. The reason is this: they say, 'if we propitiate the Yaṣḥṭio our wheat and barley will be plentiful.' Nowadays they do not do this in Gilgit (proper), but in Shinâki places, e.g. Bagrôt, at places on both sides of the River (Sherôt, Shakiôt, and Bârgo), and at Herkmosh, in these places they do it." 776 241

We may now pass on to the Human Supernatural, of whom the Rô.i and the Daiyâl are the chief. The term Rô.i is Shina. The Burushaski equivalent is Bîlas, but the word has also, I think, wider application. In Khowâr the idea is, I believe, covered by the word Gôr. 776 171

Rô.i

The Rô.i is perhaps the most interesting of the whole Gilgit cast, and of her I happen to have particularly full 764

[1] I have lately come on an isolated note: "Yachîl, a demon like a bear."

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154 information. I might have devoted the whole of this article to her but decided that it was preferable to cover as wide a field as possible. All I can do in the available space is to mention briefly her chief characteristics and her methods.

Rū.is are witches with a limited repertory. They are ordinary women possessing some specialized tastes and gifted with some extraordinary powers. Their master-taste is an appetite for human flesh which they indulge at the expense of their less gifted neighbours.

Briefly stated, their procedure is as follows: a Rū.i disables and seizes a victim and bears him off, flying through the air to some tryst where the whole Rū.i community is assembled. There they slaughter the victim, after which they chop him up into bits and distribute portions to all present. The company then partake of the feast so furnished and return again to their homes as they came. Meanwhile the victim, whose visible and material body has to all appearance remained at home unaffected, presently falls ill and dies.

A few details may be given regarding the various episodes in this drama. It appears that normally a particular Rū.i is told off by the group to provide a victim for the next assembly. The duty falls on the various members in succession. At the same time one may consider it unlikely that a Rū.i would ever see a favourable opportunity and let it slip. The process of capture is facilitated by her ability to change into any animal form she pleases. Like the Chèch she may do a series of lightning changes. So she may appear as a cat, donkey, magpie, etc., or simply as a woman or as one after another in succession. Rū.is hunt alone or sometimes in couples.

If the intended victim detects the Rū.i and divines her mission, and can keep his head and do her a physical injury, he escapes her clutches and she it is who suffers. She appears at home bearing the injury which she sustained, it may be when in animal form, and unless her victim can be brought to visit her sick-bed she dies. If through ignorance or

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weakness he does come to her, she recovers and he in his turn dies.

When the Rõ.i succeeds in her attack she flies off with the victim to the Rõ.is' meeting-place. Rõ.is fly mounted on boxes or on spinning-wheels. They are debarred from the use of the broomstick, for that is an implement of Western civilization unknown in Gilgit. The victim is carried along in a sheet. As it is stated that at certain places Rõ.is are sometimes *heard* flying through the air, one may conclude that they are not visible when they fly and that they conduct their revels in spiritual, immaterial forms and not in their everyday fleshly bodies. Similarly with the victim, for his bodily presence remains to all appearance safe in his home. What the Rõ.i secures is only some spiritualised, but still edible, presentation of him.

A Rõ.i in action has to look where she is going and to mind her steps, for if her foot touches water or a graveyard she can proceed no further.

When the victim has been safely conveyed to the place of assembly where all the Rõ.is of the district are collected, it simply remains to chop him up and distribute him in fragments to the company. The chopping-up is effected with an adze. Hence, incidentally, the adze has acquired a taste for human flesh and is a dangerous house-mate for a woman at child-birth as it is apt to go and open the door to give admittance to Dõ.õs, Peris, and Rõ.is (*vp.* 317).

No time is wasted on cooking or dressing the flesh, for the Rõ.i [illegible] information goes, enter into the order of the day. This is curious in view of the procedure at the Sabbats of the Western Witches and the popularity of dancing on festive occasions in Gilgit at the present day.

I have mentioned physical obstacles which may intervene between the Rõ.i and the indulgence of her tastes, but she has other more active interference to reckon with.

There are two kinds of human Avvi-Rõ.i, whose business

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●759 and pleasure it is to come between the Rākṣ and her prey. These are gifted with superhuman faculties of perception and with powers of locomotion not inferior to the Rākṣ's.

759 759 The Paṇḍ—the word belongs to the root *paṇḍ*, "to see"—is a "seer", a man or woman who sees what ordinary people cannot see. The Paṇḍit can see not only Rākṣ in action but also Dēvīs and Pṛts.

By one means or another the Paṇḍit gets to know that someone has been carried off. We have it generally stated that people's guardian spirits—Iṣṭadēvīs—inform the Paṇḍit when their protégés are threatened; but in one case a Paṇḍit told me that the Rākṣ themselves informed him, when he was asleep, that they were carrying off a victim and invited him to come along: a sporting action on their part, for the Paṇḍit's function is to baulk them of their prey.

The moment the Paṇḍit learns of an abduction he starts off in pursuit. He also flies through the air no less swiftly than the Rākṣ, a fact which is all the more remarkable in that he flies in his proper person and not only in an immaterial semblance. When he is absent on a mission of rescue his place at home is empty.

Having come up with the Rākṣ at their meeting-place the Paṇḍit demands the surrender of the victim, but if the latter is already dead his labour has been in vain. If the victim is still alive he enters into negotiations with the Rākṣ and as a rule succeeds in striking a bargain with them. For a ransom, in the shape it may be of a goat or an ox to be delivered within a certain period, they relinquish their prey.

All then return apparently to their various homes.

The Rākṣ are not above making attempts to deceive the Paṇḍit by concealing their victim in the skin of a goat, cow, or other animal.

A practising Paṇḍit, who told me that he was peculiarly successful in rescue work, claimed that in two years he had had 200 successes against 100 failures. He had gone so far afield

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as India. In his flights he was unconscious of mountains or other obstacles, but it is probable that like the Bilás he must not touch water or a graveyard. 754 771

The other Anti-Bilá is the Mirú. I am unable to give any explanation of the name. Mirús appear to be always men. The Mirú is a more ambiguous person than the Pushú. He is professedly an antagonist of the Bilás, but he seems to slip very easily into the rôle of aider and abettor. Ostensibly his functions and practice are similar to the Pushú's, but he appears to have less authority and less firm moral purpose. When he fails, he yields to pressure or persuasion by the Bilás and allows himself to be used as a sort of human anvil on which the victim is dismembered, or else he himself drops him up. He still, however, retains some of his original better feelings, for he refuses to accept a share of the victim's flesh.

Some doubt is cast on the Mirú's original good faith by a statement made to me by a Pushú: that the Mirú accompanies the Bilás carrying an axe with him; but perhaps this imputation is due to professional jealousy.

I must confess to some doubt as to the use of the Mirú as a chopping-block. It is a curious idea and I have no actual vernacular text to support it, only notes made in English of what I understood at the time was told me.

The Mirú is unconscious when travelling on his errand of mercy; but if his feet touches water he returns to consciousness, is unable to proceed further, and returns home.

Mirús are found in Nagir and Hagrú, but there are none [171] in Gilgit proper.

It may perhaps be useful to offer a few more facts about Bilás. Bilás are numerous and ubiquitous in the Gilgit area. They are found in Punial, Hunza, Nagir, and other districts, as well as in Gilgit proper. 754 171

My Pushú friend told me that in Gilgit there were some 300 of them, but this I can only take to be a gross exaggeration. I fancy he was something of a misogynist, for he also

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●754 informed me, with all the seriousness that the statement
[071] deserved, that there is a trace of the Rā.i in all women.

All women in fact are potential Rā.is—a truly terrible thought.

[648] Fortunately, in practice Rā.is are products of heredity rather than education. The potential Rā.i does not seem as a rule to pass spontaneously into the practising Rā.i, but if a woman is a Rā.i her daughter will also be a Rā.i.

As regards their external distinguishing features the infallible sign of a Rā.i is that her feet are turned backwards. This must only be when she is functioning as a Rā.i, and even then it is noteworthy that when she is in animal form the animal's feet are not reversed in this way. Rā.is' hair and clothes are said to be repulsive. Their hair stands up on end. Their mouth is red (query—with blood?) when they have been maltreating anyone and at night they vomit. People then say, "Perhaps she has killed some one to-day."

It is a very remarkable thing that Rā.is and their doings do not seem to arouse any active resentment either in the public or in private individuals. There are many women who are notorious as being practising Rā.is, but they do not appear to be subjected to any form of persecution. I have heard of no case of Rā.i-baiting.

Tests and ordeals, such as ducking, may be unnecessary where the quality of at least the most important Rā.is is known to everyone and is beyond dispute, but then one would expect that they would be dealt with summarily and drastically by the irate relatives of their victims.

[illegible]

It would be possible to support it by many actual instances, but that would take too much space. I will, however, quote just a couple of stories which illustrate some of the main points.

754 The following is the story of a Nagir Rā.i which I recorded in English: "Two young men in Nagir one day wanted water. There was a shortage of water so they went to the head of an

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irrigation channel where it entered a field. The men both saw two cats going along in front of them. The cats kept looking back at them and fire was issuing from their mouths. The elder of the young men threw stones at the cats, on which they both turned and seized him by the leg. Being strong-minded he preserved his senses and did not fall down but beat the two cats with a stick. The two cats then turned into a donkey. The youth, thinking that the donkey was perhaps someone's which had strayed or been left behind, mounted it.

"When they had gone on some distance he dismounted from the donkey and saw that it had turned into a magpie. He threw a stone at it and it turned into two women. With a stone he broke the head and upper jaw of one of the women, and both women vanished. In the morning the young man returned to his home and lapsed into unconsciousness.

"Meanwhile the woman who had been wounded went out on to the roof of her house, fell down from it and broke her head and her jaw, which accounted for the results of her previous misadventure. The people carried her into the house and she not unnaturally developed symptoms of indisposition. She told her people that a certain man had cast the evil eye on her and said that he must be sent for. The man accused was of course the youth who had broken her head when she was playing the Rā.i. They went off and called him, but he refused to come. The woman died. The other woman who had been with her, and the man, are still living."

The following is a statement made to me by the experienced Pushū already referred to: "Four days ago when I was asleep the Rā.is came and informed me by word of mouth: 'We have taken So-and-So, you come.' They then bore off their victim like stones carried by the wind. I said: 'I'll rescue him,' and started off after them. I caught them up at Bāltas, a big boulder in the direction of Harkū. I told them to let him go. The boy's mother was among the Rā.is. She let go the sheet in which he was tied, and I raised it up. The boy was dead. If a victim is freed when still alive all is well,

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754 but if he dies then his real self at home dies in a day or two. On this occasion there were present many Rū.is from all quarters."

In taking leave of the Rū.is it is, I presume, superfluous to lay stress on their similarity to the witches of the West. Almost every point that has been mentioned above can be duplicated from European records of witches.

The Daiyāl.

791 787 We now come to the Daiyāl, the last of the characters whom I propose to treat of here. Daiyāls are superhumanly endowed human beings, who at the present day chiefly exhibit their powers by furnishing answers to recondite questions. They supply on request information relating to what lies outside the scope of the ordinary senses of sight and hearing, and regarding what is going to come to pass in the future.

Their sources of knowledge are hidden, but there is nothing obscure about their procedure, for they exhibit their powers before all the world in broad daylight.

The public attend on the local polo ground, which corresponds to the village green. At one side sit the local band of drums and pipes and the Daiyāl enters the circle formed by the spectators. There he primes himself by inhaling the smoke of burning juniper twigs which has some sort of intoxicating effect on him. After this he divides his time between stooping over and listening to the drums, dancing round the circle in various measures and posturing in the middle of it.

At certain points he may be asked questions by members of the general public, the answers to which he ostensibly obtains by listening to the drums or by watching the behaviour of some grains of corn thrown on the vibrating parchment of a drum. His answers are couched in language which is really I think unintelligible, but which someone eventually is always found to interpret.